



Whether Common or Not

By WILL M. MAUPIN.

Looking Backward

The crackers don't sound as loud as of yore,
And rockets don't fly so high;
Somehow the candles don't sizz-z-z and roar
As they did in a past July.
And candy and cake, and the jams and jell
Don't taste as they tasted then—
Ah, me; 'tis the tale that the long years tell
To the grayhaired boys grown men.

There's never a day that we celebrate
That makes the blood run fast
Like it did 'way back on a distant date,
On a Fourth that has long since passed.
The singers can't sing and the bands can't play
As loud and as sweet as then;
Nor the sky so blue, nor the crowds so gay,
Since we are the grayhaired men.

Ah, wouldn't you give of silver and gold
If you could up and away
On the backward road till your eyes behold
The Fourth of a yesterday.
And wouldn't the crackers send forth a roar;
And wouldn't the rockets fly?
What wouldn't you give if a boy once more
On an old-time Fourth of July?

An Old-Fashioned Fourth

Really, I do not care to tell just how many years ago, come next Fourth of July, that this particular celebration happened, but I'll admit it was quite a spell before Graham—or was it Bell?—invented the telephone, or Edison the phonograph, or Marconi the wireless telegraph. It was also quite a spell in advance of the incandescent light, and a long time before my eyes saw a self-binder in operation. That's near enough for all practical purposes, and it doesn't disclose the fact that I am past forty-seven, with a lot of gray in my hair.

Anyhow, as long ago as it may have been, it wasn't so long ago that I have forgotten it, that's sure.

Of course I had been dreaming about this particular celebration for weeks, but the first tangible evidence of its near approach was mother's feverish activity in getting edibles ready. It seemed as if she were preparing to feed the entire countryside—and that's about what she did, too; for the fame of Aunt Sally's cooking and hospitality was considerably wider than the boundaries of Macon county. As a general proposition father was pretty active in those days, but I recall that on the morning of this particular Fourth he was exasperatingly slow in getting "Mark" and "Topsy" hitched up, and I was quite sure everybody in the neighborhood drove by while he was getting the harness on the ponies. But we finally got started, father and mother in the seat, me on a little stool at their feet, and my baby sister in mother's arms.

It was six miles to Walnut Grove—on this particular occasion the longest six miles ever. But we finally covered the distance. Walnut Grove wasn't a town or a city—it was just a big grove on a farm. But we had a procession, and fireworks,

and speaking and everything else that goes to make a real for-sure celebration. There was a big float at the head of the parade. Columbia was perched on a raised platform in the center, with the states grouped about her. I've forgotten just how many states there were then, but it didn't take such an awfully big wagon to haul 'em. Ceora Peck was Columbia—I remember that mighty well, for Ceora was my sweetheart. True, she was something like three times my age, and I was still in roundabouts, but Ceora was my sweetheart just the same. After the parade came the singing and speaking. Father pronounced the invocation, and the glee club sang "Star Spangled Banner," and "Hail Columbia." We didn't have any band, but Florence Maguire played the melodeon, and I'll bet there never was a brass band that could get as much music out of their brass and reeds and drums as Florence could lug out of that little old melodeon. Believe me! Then Nannie Bedford read the Declaration of Independence, and after another song—I've forgotten what it was—some renowned orator delivered the oration. I remained until Nannie Bedford had finished reading the Declaration, after which, like the gentleman in Bret Harte's little verses about Table Mountain, "the subsequent procedin's interested me no more." By sitting very quiet during the ceremonies up to that moment I had earned a magnificent sum of money from father. If my memory serves me right the money consisted of a silver 3-cent piece, a 5-cent shinplaster and a 10-cent shinplaster. Additionally, I had the promise of another shinplaster after the basket dinner. Firecrackers cost ten cents a bunch in those days, but they made a noise. None of your little fizzling, sneezing make-believe firecrackers, but real whoppers that burned for-sure blisters if you didn't let go of 'em in time. And popcorn balls stuck together with real sugar. No glucose, mind you—sugar. And genuine taffy candy! And lemon drops! And prize packages! Say, we used to get some wonderful bargains in those prize packages, didn't we?

Either that orator talked an awfully long while, or else I spent my fortune quickly, for after my last penny was gone he talked for almost a week. But finally he finished and after the glee club—Florence Maguire at the melodeon, mind you—had sung another national air, the preparations for the "big basket dinner at noon" were soon under way.

No, sir; there wasn't any sneaking off by families to consume the dinner. No, sir-ee! Everybody put their dinners together, and everybody had brought enough to feed everybody else, and then some. The wonder is that there was an egg laid in Macon county for a year, for it seemed as if every fryable chicken had been offered as a sacrifice upon the altar of its country. And boiled ham, and roast beef, and cold tongue, and roast pork, and cold mutton! And apple butter, and plum butter, and peach butter! And spiced peaches, and pickled peaches, and preserved peaches! And grape jelly, and currant jelly, and apple jelly, and plum jelly! And quince preserves!! Say, never in my whole life have I ever had all the quince preserves I wanted. I've had all I could eat, but never all I wanted. And apple pie, and plum pie, and peach

pie, and pumpkin pie, and elderberry pie, and blackberry pie, and raspberry pie, and custard pie, and vinegar pie! And cakes—O, what's the use of trying to recall the names of all the different kinds of cake?

"Hi, there, Brother Williard! Come over and try some of Aunt Sally's fried chicken!"

"All right; coming right over. I'll bring some of Aunt Kate's cold boiled Southdown mutton."

"Say there, Uncle Joe; you don't have to hurry. There's lots of time and plenty for all of us!"

"That's all right," drawls Uncle Joe Maguire, in reply, "but I'm so tall I got t' eat faster'n you 'cause it's got such a long ways t' go."

How the good women scurried to and fro, exchanging jellies and jams, and pickles and preserves! And the men folks talked politics, though politics was mightily one-sided in that section of Illinois about that time. I have some lively recollections of that basket dinner, one of them being a boyish regret that my legs were not hollow. But finally the time came when I couldn't have gotten another mouthful down with a hydraulic ram, consequently I had to quit; although the whole crowd of us hadn't eaten into the edges of the feast.

I got the other shinplaster pretty soon after dinner, and spent it like a prince. Then I stood around and watched the men folks jump and run foot races, while the women folks exchanged recipes and indulged in reminiscences of the war, which hadn't been over so long that its scars were all healed.

Along about 4 o'clock somebody surreptitiously nailed the sun against the sky so it couldn't move. It was an awfully mean trick to play on us little fellows, for it postponed the fireworks interminably. But finally the nail broke after a year or two, it seemed, and just about the time I was ready to die of old age Uncle Henry Pickrell and Uncle Jim Hill and Dr. Ferguson proceeded to touch 'em off. Dr. Ferguson was almost as big an attraction as the fireworks, for he weighed 350 pounds and was as short of breath as I was of shinplasters about that time. They made lots better skyrockets and roman candles and pin wheels in those days than they do now—but not so many of them. The "grandest display of fireworks ever shown in Macon county" was over at last, and father proceeded to hitch up the ponies again.

And that's the last I remembered.

Don't even remember the start home, nor the arrival there. I just remember that I woke up next day with eleven hundred blisters on my hands, a couple of eyebrows missing and a roundabout as full of holes as a collander. Mother told me that when she got home the night before I was so sound asleep she couldn't wake me up to put on my nightie. Maybe that was the real reason, but I've always had a suspicion that she was a bit sleepy herself about that time.

That's about the first Fourth of July I remember, and although I've seen hundreds and hundreds of them since, it really was the biggest one that ever happened. I'll bet you they never had such a celebration in Walnut Grove after that, or anywhere else!

And next Tuesday what are we going to do? Wake up about 4 a. m. and growl because the kids in the neighborhood are shattering the atmosphere with pesky and dangerous dynamite crackers. Then mope around the house till after noon, then go out to the park and suffer and swelter till night. Then home to bed after seeing some dinky fireworks. That's all. Of course the kiddies won't look at it that way, for they're going to get all the Fourth of July

that's coming to them if Dad has to pawn his watch.

But, honestly now, people today don't know a blooming thing about celebrating the Glorious Fourth, do they? The celebrations we had umpty-steen years ago had the present day celebrations beat a mile. Believe me!

Explained

"But didn't you say you were in favor of raw wool?" cried the exasperated voter.

"I did," replied Representative Soothun.

"And now you are opposed to taking the tariff off of wool?"

"Most assuredly I am."

"Well, explain it!" shrieked the heavily burdened consumer.

"That's easy," replied Representative Soothun. "Do you suppose I want to make it possible for anybody to pull the wool over the eyes of the voter by letting it in duty free?"

Mistake

"What's this?" growled the husband, sticking his spoon into the mixture.

"That's pudding, my dear," replied the wife. "I found just the loveliest recipe in the 'Housewife's Home Companion' and I couldn't help trying it."

"Huh!" grunted the husband. "Sure you didn't make a mistake and get hold of the 'Bricklayer and Mason' and cut out the directions for making a new kind of moisture proof mortar?"

Two Views

"Oh, isn't the fragrance of this new-mown clover delicious!" chirruped Miss Flighty. "So rendolent, so soul-satisfying, so utterly rural in its flavor!"

"Yes, I reckon so," remarked Uncle Josh, as he passed his sunburned hand across his perspiring brow, "but it ain't in it with the smell o' that fryin' bacon that ma's gettin' ready f'r us."

"Six Best Sellers"

- Legislation.
- Judicial Decisions.
- Ice.
- Special Privileges.
- Hot Air.
- Franchises for Public Service Corporations.

Dangerous

"What was the cause of Senator Grabball's sudden illness?"
"He discovered that he had voted for the people instead of his trust and the shock prostrated him."

Brain Leaks

The men who do not need a spur often need a balance-wheel.

Reputation is the world's measure. Character is what we really have.

Satan smiles every time he sees a church closed for the summer.

The man who considers the world a lemon to be squeezed usually has a sour disposition.

It would take more than nine tailors to make men out of some creatures in bifurcated garments.

Grandfathers and grandmothers have been primarily responsible for many of the present-day divorces.

When a man's shadow turns eastward he is wise if he keeps his face westward. That's where the sun is shining.

We are carrying a concealed club for the benefit of the fellow who advises us to "keep cool" this kind of weather.

The "good enough" workman is usually looking for a job when the "best way" workman is considering an offer of advanced wages elsewhere.